

THE CURFEW BELL

Purchased: 1887

Address: 176 North Center

Present owner: Lehi City Fire Department

On 18 July 1887, the Lehi City council passed a Curfew Law to control vandalism caused by groups of youngsters roaming the town after dark. The specific ordinance read: “It shall be unlawful for any person under fourteen years of age to be or remain in or upon any of the streets, alleys, or public places in this city at night after the hour of nine o’clock, unless said person is accompanied by a parent, guardian or other person having the legal custody of such minor person, or is in performance of any errand of duty directed by such parent, guardian or other person having the care and the custody of such minor person, or whose employment makes it necessary to be upon said street, alleys or public places during the night time after said specified hours. Any person violating the provisions of this section shall, on conviction, be fined in any sum not to exceed five dollars for each offense, and shall stand committed until such fine and costs are paid.”

In September 1887 Mayor George Webb was authorized \$50 to purchase a bell which was installed in a belfry atop city hall. The curfew bell, rung by the marshal every evening at 9:00, at first sent children scurrying to their homes. While the curfew age was eventually raised to sixteen and even later to eighteen, the pealing of the bell soon became ordinary and children and teenagers could be seen playing under the town’s street lights long after dark.

The 20 June 1901 “Lehi Banner” carried a police warning against “playing games on the Sabbath Day,” using “profane language on our streets,” and disregarding the curfew. Offenders were warned to obey these laws or “find [yourselves] in the clutches of the officers.” For a time these threats effected results, but eventually the law again became halfheartedly respected and enforced.

Aside from its curfew warning, the 9:00 p.m. sounding served as the standard for setting all Lehi timepieces. Many a Lehi citizen recalls seeing his father check his watch nightly as the bell sounded its timely signal. The bell also served as a fire alarm. The town was divided into four quadrants and the number of taps of the bell indicated the area of town citizens were to run to form a bucket brigade. The Lehi volunteer fire department was not formed until 1901.

Beginning in 1895 the curfew bell was also sounded at 9:30 each Sunday morning to announce Sunday School. The historic bell remained atop city hall (remodeled into a fire station), until a new fire station with electric siren was completed in 1938. The bell was then placed in storage, and used only for early morning Fourth of July ringings, when it was hauled about town on a trailer. Enthusiastic, hammer-wielding firemen caused several notable dents in the old alarum.

In 1973 the historic bell was permanently mounted on a framework in front of the fire station at 54 North Center. When the new fire station was completed in the Public Safety Building in 1990, the fire department moved the Curfew Bell from 54 North Center and installed it in front of the new facilities at 176 North Center.

It is hoped that in the future, through efforts of the Lehi Historical Preservation Committee and the Lehi Volunteer Fire Department, an appropriate plaque can be installed near the Curfew Bell detailing its history.